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# CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY





# THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1400 24 March 1965

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	24 March 1965	

# SUMMARY

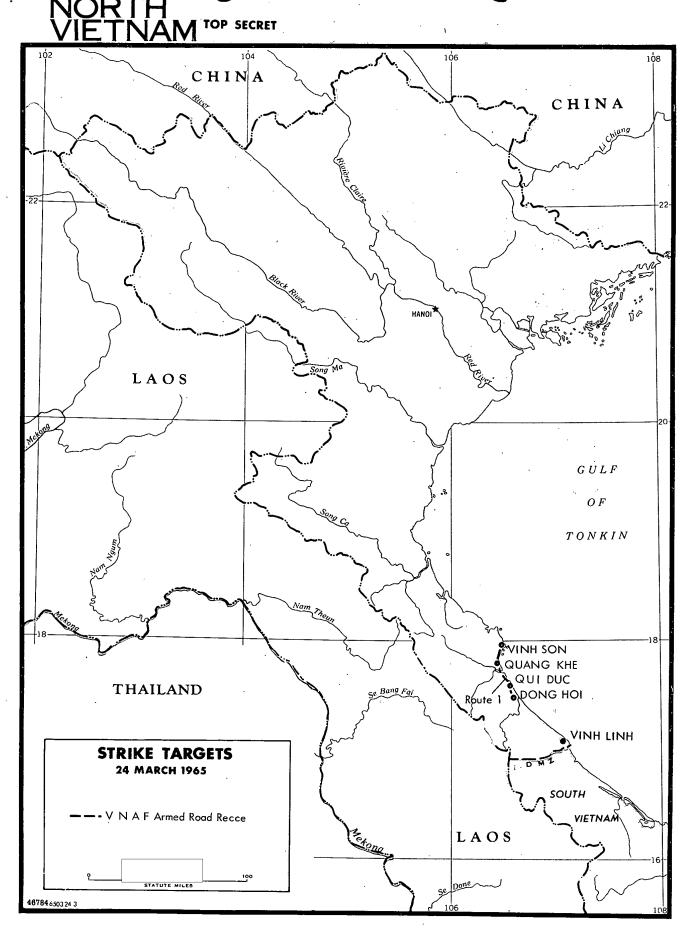
- I. North Vietnam: South Vietnamese and US aircraft carried out the fifth strike against DRV military targets in six days on 24 March. Twelve planes hit the radar site at Dong Hoi and then ranged north to attack targets of opportunity along Route I (Para. 1). The earlier strike against a radar installation at Vinh Linh on 23 March is now known from post-strike photography to have inflicted extensive damage to the facility (Para. 2).
- II. Communist Political Developments: As the air strikes have stepped up, Communist political reaction to them has diminished. The latest attacks have drawn only pro-forma denunciations from the bloc, including Hanoi. However, in the past two days bloc propagandists have been attempting to exploit non-Communist actions in Vietnam with a concerted attack against the US/South Vietnamese use of "poison gas" on the Viet Cong (Paras. 1-5). The Communists apparently hope they can blow this issue up to the dimensions of their anti-US "germwarfare" charges during the Korean War. The use of nonlethal gas is also receiving wide adverse publicity in the Free World (Paras. 6-8).
- III. Negotiations: The only other significant Communist political development during the period has been the new blast by the Viet Cong's Liberation

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Front against a negotiated settlement of the war. The president of the Front stated on 23 March that negotiations were "useless" so long as the US has not withdrawn all its troops and weapons from South Vietnam (Para. 1)

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- V. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Elsewhere in the South, criticism of the Quat government for its "inaction" have come recently from several key ARVN military commanders (Paras. 1 & 2). Premier Quat, meanwhile, is voicing his own unhappiness with Deputy Premier Tran Van Tuyen for his tactlessness with provincial officials (Para. 3).
- VI. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Viet Cong military action continues at a low pace, as it has during the past week (Paras 1 & 2). However, government forces do not appear to be taking advantage of the lull to press their own offensive operations (Paras 3 & 4).



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# I. NORTH VIETNAM

- l. Eight Vietnamese Skyraider aircraft and four US flak suppression jets struck the radar site at Dong Hoi and nearby AAA positions at approximately 1600 local Vietnam time (0300 EST) on 24 March. The strike aircraft then turned north along DRV Route 1 searching for targets of opportunity on which to use their remaining ordnance. They attacked six boats near the coast at Qui Duc, and one large junk near the Quang Khe naval base. Photographic results of the latest attack are not yet available.
- 2. Photographic results of the 23 March air strike against another DRV radar site, located at Vinh Linh, just north of the demilitarized zone, indicate that seven buildings in the facility were destroyed and two others damaged. Although the radar antenna appears undamaged in photography,

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#### II. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- l. Hanoi has kicked off what may turn out to be a major propaganda campaign to exploit the use of "toxic gas" in South Vietnam. The party daily, in an editorial on 24 March, accused the US of "barbarous" and "inhuman" actions in "massacring" the South Vietnamese people not only with "gas" but with napalm, white phosphorus, and defoliants. The editorial compared the US "atrocities" to those of Hitler and predicted that the US could not escape the same fate as the German dictator.
- 2. Peiping quickly picked up Western press reports on the use of what it called "poison gas" in South Vietnam and may be planning an all-out propaganda campaign. In its initial commentary, Peiping on 24 March said the use of gas testifies to the "US bandits'utter disregard for international law and humanitarianism and shows them up as fascist cannibals."
  - 3. Soviet propaganda exploitation of the issue has generally described the use of the weapon as another "imperialist crime" that will further isolate the US from the "peace-loving" countries of the world. Moscow has reported expressions of "anxiety" from various parts of the globe. In particular, Moscow TASS points up the public indignation in Great Britain and reports British Foreign Secretary Stewart's 23 March address without comment.
- 4. According to a Dutch correspondent at the UN, who spoke with an unnamed "high Soviet official," the Soviets are considering using the "gas" issue as a peg on which to call for a UN Security Council meeting. The US Mission has received no other indication along these lines and is inclined to doubt the correspondent's reliability. This line may have been developed for its propaganda effect, as it is very doubtful that the USSR would step out of line with Hanoi on the question of UN discussion over the Vietnamese issue. As yet, there has been no authoritative Soviet comment on the issue.
- 5. In Britain, Prime Minister Wilson refused to condemn the action in Parliament on 23 March,

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despite unrest among his own Labor Party members. He did, however, tell Parliament that the introduction of any new weapons in Vietnam carried with it "greater danger." The press reaction in England was initially quite hostile, but some papers have begun now to moderate their stand, taking the line that this type of "gas warfare is better than killing."

- 6. Relatively restrained press comment in France at the outset of the gas issue, has now given way to a series of major criticial items, some of them carried on the government-controlled television network. The American Embassy in Paris expects a marked upsurge in petitions, demonstrations, and critical press. The initial press reaction in West Germany was quite negative, with many papers expressing fear of Communist tit-for-tat retaliation.
- 7. The only significant Asian reaction so far has come from Japan. The nation's largest and most respected daily, Asahi, charged on 23 March that the US was using Asians as guinea pigs, and as a result had lost many friends in Japan and endangered the US-Japan security treaty. The Communist Akahata seized upon a recent incident reported from Okinawa to claim that the US had first tested its "noxious gas" on Japanese high-school children as guinea pigs there.

# III. NEGOTIATIONS

l. The Hanoi-directed Liberation Front has again thrown cold water on the idea of negotiating the Vietnamese war. In a statement broadcast by the Viet Cong radio on 23 March, Liberation Front President Nguyen Huu Tho stated flatly that "at present all negotiations are useless as long as the US imperialists do not withdraw all the troops, weapons, and means of war of the US and its satellites from South Vietnam." This added a new note to the usual Communist demands by insisting that the Liberation Front would have to "have the decisive voice" in South Vietnamese affairs before a settlement could be achieved. Previously the Communists had only insisted that the Front should be a part of any settlement.



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# V. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. General Thi, the influential I Corps commander, is reported to have complained recently that Quat and his cabinet were "immobilized" and that it was nearly impossible to get a decision from the government. Thi cited his inability to obtain central government approval for a 350-page pacification plan for Central Vietnam which he said he submitted on 20 January. He said he was therefore uncertain about his authority to spend funds allocated for pacification operations.

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2. Quat, meanwhile, has again voiced criticism of Deputy Premier Tran Van Tuyen, this time for his allegedly tactless performance during a recent Saigon convention of provincial chiefs and other local officials. The premier hinted that he might eventually seek to remove Tuyen. Tuyen, a controversial figure, has also drawn criticism from General Thi and some of the Buddhist leaders.

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3. In a continuation of the government's drive against peace groups, police in Tay Ninh Province on 23 March arrested 27 members of a Cao Dai group which has recently been agitating for a cease-fire under some vaguely defined US guarantee.

- 4. Premier Quat, accompanied by Ambassador Taylor, today paid a short visit to the carrier Coral Sea, flagship of the 7th Fleet Task Force 77.
- 5. The Armed Forces Council has reportedly approved a suggestion by the Quat government that General "Big" Minh be named ambassador to Taiwan. The Council's approval stipulated that Minh proceed directly from Bangkok, where the former chief of state has tarried for several months riding out the numerous political storms which have occurred in Saigon.
- 6. The German ambassador, at a well-organized and well-attended ceremony sponsored by the Vietnamese Ministry of Health, today turned over 30 fully equipped ambulances to the Saigon government. Most of the ambulances will be assigned to provincial hospitals throughout Vietnam.

# VI. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1. MACV's military report for 22 March shows 61 Viet Cong initiated incidents; eight occurred during the reporting period.
- 2. In the I Corps, in Thua Thien Province, an escorted passenger train was sabotaged and a popular forces unit was fired upon. One person was killed, three wounded, and two weapons lost. In the II Corps, Communist guerrillas entered and harassed a new life hamlet in Quang Duc Province. Within the III Corps in Tay Ninh Province, a guerrilla land mine exploded under a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) vehicle, killing four persons and wounding two. Small arms fire harassed a government outpost in Bien Hoa Province. Government posts and watchtowers also were harassed in Kien Giang Province in the IV Corps, and an ARVN bivouac area in Chuong Thien Province was shelled by 60-mm, mortar fire.

The press reports that a land development center in the central highlands was burned down on 23 March, two outposts in the Saigon area were attacked, and that a government military column was the object of an attempted ambush northeast of the capital. Three Vietnamese troops were reported killed and four wounded, while Viet Cong casualties were placed at four dead.

3. The level of government ground operations of battalion strength or larger reflected a sharp decline. Nine operations were initiated and 13 terminated, leaving 15 in progress on 22 March.

On 22 March, a joint ground-air "eagle flight" operation was conducted in the Da Nang special sector against a suspected Viet Cong training center. Close air support, air cover, and interdiction missions were flown by 24 B-57s, five F-100s, eight USAF A-1Es, and 14 VNAF A-1Hs. Approximately 600 ARVN troops were airlifted into four designated landing zones by 42 USMC

UH-34 helicopters and 10 VNAF H-34 helicopters, escorted by eight armed US Army UH-1Bs.

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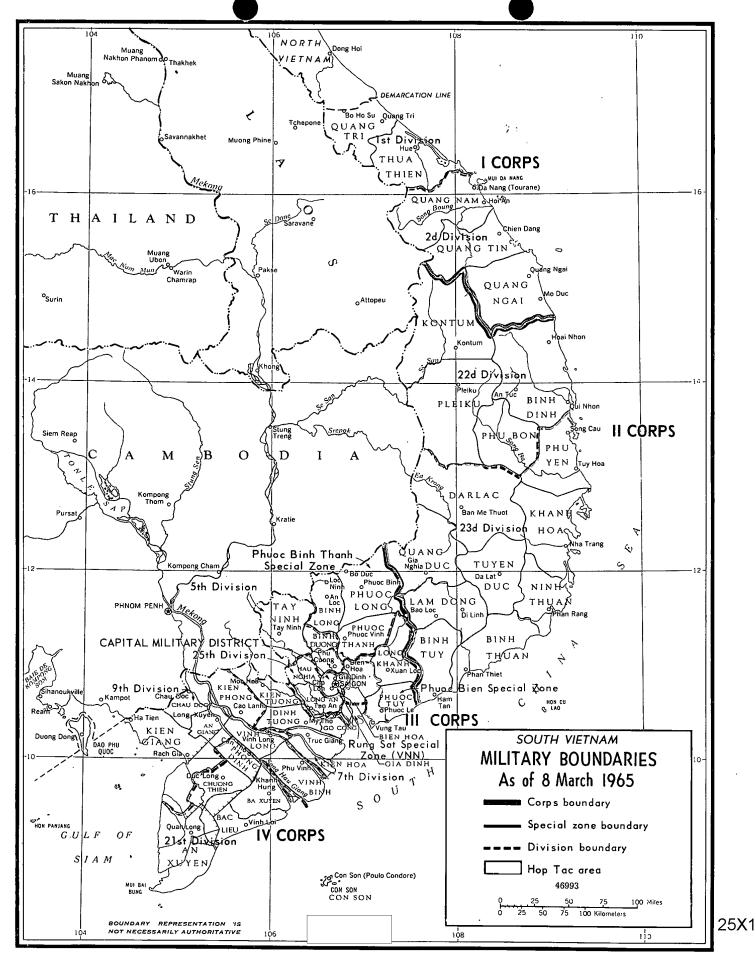
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nist losses were only one PW; however, ARVN headquarters reported 20 Viet Cong KIA and 50 WIA carried away.

4. Company-strength or smaller operations conducted on 22 March increased to 2,302, about an average day for the ARVN. Twelve contacts were made with the Viet Cong, with minor casualties sustained by both sides.

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